Governing Council of the United Nations Environment Programme

Distr.
GENERAL

UNEP/GC.17/6
26 April 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

Seventeenth session
Nairobi, 10-21 May 1993

ITEM 7:* PROGRAMME MATTERS, INCLUDING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PLAN OF ACTION TO COMBAT DESERTIFICATION

IMPLEMENTATION AND MID-TERM REVIEW OF THE SYSTEM-WIDE MEDIUM-TERM ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME (SWMTEP) FOR 1990-1995

Report of the Executive Director

Summary

The present document reports on progress in implementing the second system-wide medium-term environment programme, 1990-1995 (SWMTEP II) and on the results of the mid-term review of SWMTEP for the period 1990-1995, carried out in accordance with Governing Council decision 15/21. It also provides the conclusions of the Executive Director and her recommendations that, in view of the new system-wide coordinating arrangement being proposed, UNEP's coordinating mandate be assessed at a later stage and that proposals be made to the Council at its regular session in 1995 concerning the need for a future planning and strategy document.

Suggested action by the Governing Council

The Council may wish to: take note of the report of the Executive Director; endorse the Executive Director's recommendation to assess the future arrangements for meeting the need for a strategy and planning document, in view of the new system-wide coordination arrangements being established; and request the Executive Director to report to the Council at its regular session in 1995 on the need for a system-wide planning and strategy document in the field of the environment.

---

* Refers to the number of the item on the Provisional Agenda (UNEP/GC.17/1).

Na.93-0275 270493

/...

This paper contains 75% recycled waste fibre

Introduction

1. The second system-wide medium-term environment programme, 1990-1995 (SWMTEP II) was prepared through the Designated Officials for Environmental Matters (DOEM) of the United Nations system, under the auspices of the Administrative Committee on Coordination (ACC) as the central body in the United Nations system responsible for coordination in the field of the environment. As initially conceived, the six-year SWMTEP was to serve as an operational instrument for planning and formulating the environmental activities of the United Nations system and it is one of the principal tools used to coordinate those activities.

2. In its decision SS.I/3 of March 1988, the Governing Council approved SWMTEP II. In paragraph 411 of the Programme, there is the following call for a mid-term evaluation:

> "Although based on and taking fully into account project and programme evaluation, the evaluation of the system-wide programme will be of a different nature. Because of the difficulty of defining quantifiable goals for the evaluation, the evaluation will be essentially qualitative. Its purposes are to review the relevance and adequacy of the main strategic orientations, to assess the effectiveness and impact of the various component programmes and to evaluate the effectiveness of co-operation and co-ordination arrangements within the United Nations system and between the system and various other international and national organizations and institutions. In its final stage, the evaluation should be the responsibility of DOEM. Its timing should be related to the proposed mid-term review of the programme, which must be scheduled for the end of 1992 so that its results can be submitted to the session of UNEP Governing Council 1993..."

3. In its decision SS.I/3, the Governing Council also requested the Executive Director to report to it at its regular sessions on progress in the implementation of SWMTEP II.

4. A year after that decision, when it was clear that the General Assembly was contemplating the convening of a United Nations Conference on Environment and Development (UNCED) in 1992, the Council, in its decision 15/21 of May 1989, decided that, although no formal revision of SWMTEP II was required, the mid-term evaluation of SWMTEP should be carried out as stipulated in paragraph 411 of SWMTEP, 1990-1995 and that at its seventeenth regular session the Council would "provide the Administrative Committee on Coordination with its views as policy guidance for the preparation of the system-wide medium-term environment programme for the period 1996-2001".

5. In compliance with those decisions, the Executive Director hereby submits a brief report on the progress in implementing SWMTEP II; a mid-term evaluation of SWMTEP II; and a recommendation to undertake an assessment of the discharge of UNEP's coordinating mandate at a later stage and provide recommendations to the Council on arrangements for meeting the need for a future planning and strategy document for the United Nations system in the field of the environment.

PROGRESS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SYSTEM-WIDE MEDIUM-TERM ENVIRONMENT PROGRAMME; 1990-1995

6. In accordance with Governing Council decision 15/21, UNEP, in preparing its biennial programme budget documents for 1990-1991, 1992-1993 and 1994-1995, has systematically incorporated the objectives of SWMTEP II into the formulation of its programmes.

7. The successive programme budgets have been discussed and formulated in close consultation with the DOEM and have listed concurrent activities being undertaken within the United Nations system, either jointly with UNEP or independently. In the implementation of its biennial programmes, the UNEP secretariat has, therefore, attempted to implement SWMTEP objectives in each programme area. Inter-agency consultations, held in January 1993 between UNEP and the relevant agencies and organizations of the United Nations system for the development of UNEP's programme budget document for the biennium 1994-1995, focused on incorporating into SWMTEP II the additional responsibilities accruing to UNEP from Agenda 21 adopted by UNCED.

8. SWMTEP II has provided a valuable compilation of environmental activities in the United Nations system, allowing complementary activities, gaps and areas of possible duplication and cooperation to be identified. However, because the structure, centralized planning approaches, and varying programme cycles currently used by the organizations in the United Nations system that participate in SWMTEP are often not compatible with the SWMTEP programming cycle, implementation of SWMTEP II has required special efforts and frequent adjustments. The United Nations system has implemented SWMTEP II to the extent that activities have been carried out as envisaged by the participating agencies and organizations at the time SWMTEP II was formulated. Consequently, most of the activities of the United Nations system in SWMTEP II are implemented through the approved programmes of the agencies' respective governing bodies, and not in response to SWMTEP.

9. Additionally, SWMTEP II was being implemented at a time when new concepts of sustainable development and activities designed to achieve this were being introduced into the programmes of the United Nations system. Consequently, a number of changes were introduced in the programme, making implementation somewhat more complicated than had been the case for SWMTEP I. For example, SWMTEP II incorporated the new environment and development concepts contained in the Governing Council's Environmental Perspective to the Year 2000 and Beyond and in the report of the World Commission on Environment and Development, *Our Common Future*. The Governing Council, in its decision 15/21, recognized the importance of the introduction of that new element and, indeed, in this respect SWMTEP II was found to be useful as the basis for preparing the report of the Secretary-General to the UNCED Preparatory Committee on the work of the United Nations system related to UNCED, entitled "Overview of system-wide activities relevant to General Assembly Resolution 44/228" (A/Conf.151/PC/6).

Results of the Mid-Term Evaluation

10. Against the background described in the above paragraphs, the DOEM outlined an approach to the mid-term evaluation which accepted the Governing Council's view, as expressed in paragraph 411 of SWMTEP II, that "... the evaluation will be essentially qualitative". Also, because the evaluation

procedure was occurring at exactly the time United Nations organizations and agencies were preparing for UNCED, DOEM recommended that agencies and organizations would initiate self-evaluations, based on a questionnaire prepared by UNEP. The questionnaire contained three basic areas of enquiry:

- Assessment of SWMTEP II as a strategic planning and coordination tool;

- Assessment of the influence of SWMTEP II on the programmatic process of the United Nations system; and

- Recommendations and suggestions on ways to strengthen the SWMTEP process.

11. Concerning the assessment of SWMTEP II, agencies and organizations said they found it valuable as a compilation of individual organizational strategies and plans of the United Nations system. Agencies and organizations were generally of the view that SWMTEP and its preparatory process facilitated a better understanding of the range of environmental issues and provided information on proposed activities within the United Nations system. Thus, it contributed to helping the system to set acceptable environmental goals and policies. This was also the evaluation of the UNEP secretariat, which used SWMTEP as the basis for its coordination of environmental activities and programmes in the United Nations system.

12. On the second question, concerning the influence of SWMTEP II on programming within the United Nations system, the participating agencies and organizations indicated that SWMTEP II had a very limited impact on their programming exercises. Because SWMTEP provided useful information on ongoing or proposed activities within the United Nations system, several agencies had taken SWMTEP into account in their planning. However, they had not found that it furnished a framework that fostered synergistic and supportive action. Most of them noted that their planning and programming cycles were not compatible with those of SWMTEP. Consequently, they had only a limited possibility to use SWMTEP as a programming tool. One observed that SWMTEP II was more a reflection of the results of medium-term planning in the system than an influence on that planning. Most noted that, while SWMTEP II was submitted to and approved by the Governing Council of UNEP, with the exception of the International Labour Organisation (ILO), the document had never been submitted to nor considered by other United Nations governing bodies. When SWMTEP II had been used by most agencies, that use was more of a justification for reinforcing existing programme areas than for influencing the adoption of new areas of activity.

13. At the time of the evaluation, most of the DOEM expressed the view that the present time was not appropriate to make recommendations on strengthening SWMTEP. Many of them were involved in evaluating the impact of Agenda 21 on their programmes and were also deeply involved in the discussion of possible future programme coordinating mechanisms for the United Nations, within the framework of the ACC, whose Task Force on Environment and Development was considering policy issues relating to the follow-up to UNCED by the United Nations system and effective coordination and cooperation in the implementation of activities.

14. The overall conclusion of the evaluation of SWMTEP II was that the document and the collaborative process for developing it were useful as a compilation of activities and as a coordinating tool in the field of environment. However, as a programming tool for the entire system it was not and could not be effective because of the very different programming, timing and decision-making processes of the various members of the United Nations system.

Developments in the ACC Framework

15. Following the mid-term evaluation of SWMTEP II, the outcome of UNCED and the adoption of Agenda 21, ACC undertook a system-wide reappraisal of the established structures for inter-agency cooperation and coordination (see UNEP/GC.17/12/Add.1). An ACC Task Force was established in 1992 to review existing machinery for cooperation and coordination for implementing Agenda 21 and to make recommendations for future action. The Task Force's report endorsed the role of the ACC as the "high-level inter-agency coordination mechanism" called for in Agenda 21 (paragraph 38.17). At the intermediate level, the ACC established an Inter-agency Committee on Sustainable Development (IACSD) whose responsibilities include, among other things, ensuring effective cooperation and coordination of the United Nations system in the implementation of Agenda 21. UNEP is a core member of the Committee, which will be serviced by the newly established United Nations Department for Policy Coordination and Sustainable Development and chaired by the head of that Department.

16. The Task Force recognized that there were a certain number of well-defined environmental issues in which UNEP could play a leadership role, as indicated in Agenda 21 (paragraphs 38.21 and 38.22). The ACC was aware of the suggestion of the Task Force that the Executive Director of UNEP be invited to submit proposals for system-wide cooperation and coordination in the field of the environment, after seeking the advice of the DOEM (these proposals are included in document UNEP/GC.17/12/Add.1.).

Conclusions and Recommendations

17. In view of the foregoing, the Executive Director concludes that, although SWMTEP has been a useful vehicle in the past for UNEP to exercise its environmental coordinating role in the United Nations system, for a variety of reasons it has not lived up to the original purpose for which it was designed, namely, to serve as an instrument for planning and formulating the environment programme of the United Nations system.

18. The above assessment is partly related to the preparatory process for SWMTEP II, which had not fully accounted for the fact that agencies and organizations of the system had different levels of interest and involvement in the process, which did not provide for a detailed interaction at the programmatic level to allow UNEP to realize fully its catalytic and coordinating role.

19. In light of the above, it is the view of the Executive Director that, given the evolving institutional framework in the United Nations system, a decision on the future of SWMTEP should be compatible with and complementary to coordination arrangements for environment and development within the United Nations system. In this regard, the future arrangements for system-wide coordination, as outlined in document UNEP/GC.17/12/Add.1, will be of critical importance. In response to the invitation to the Executive Director

of UNEP contained in the ACC Task Force Report on follow-up to UNCED, i.e. "to submit specific proposals on system-wide cooperation and coordination in the field of the environment ..." The Executive Director plans to consult with agencies and programmes of the United Nations system and, based upon these consultations, to propose an agreed coordination mechanism, under the chairmanship of the Executive Director of UNEP, to consider and decide on policy issues relating to environmental coordination in accordance with the general policy framework of the ACC. If appropriate and agreeable to UNEP's United Nations partners, the mechanism might well involve continuing the DOEM and modifying, as necessary, its mandate and structure. The Executive Director will report on this to the Council at its next regular session.

20. The Executive Director also plans to explore whether the new coordination machinery might provide a flexible framework for some joint programming in the future. An assessment of the value of these arrangements would be made at a later stage.

21. Given the evolving situation concerning institutional arrangements for system-wide coordination generally in the United Nations system and the additional focus and impetus provided by UNCED, the Executive Director believes that a Council decision on the future of SWMTEP should be deferred. This would allow the Executive Director to (a) undertake a qualitative assessment of whether the mandated coordination functions of the Council will be accounted for in the new coordination framework to be established within the United Nations system and (b) to evaluate whether there continues to be a need for a system wide planning and strategy document. This evaluation would also take into account the review of SWMTEP II contained in the present document.

22. Accordingly, the Executive Director suggests that, at the end of the current SWMTEP period, her proposals concerning the need for a system-wide planning and strategy document will be based on the above-mentioned assessment and will be provided to the Governing Council at its regular session in 1995. It is further suggested that, if the Council at that time should decide that UNEP should prepare a future planning and strategy document, not necessarily to be named SWMTEP, the document would be prepared to cover the period commencing in 1998, so as to be compatible with the planning cycle of the United Nations Medium-Term Plan (1998-2003). The preparation of such a document should take fully into account the lessons learned in the preparation and implementation of the current SWMTEP.